

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1949)

Heft: 1126

Rubrik: City Swiss Club

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P. A. MOEHR.
President: City Swiss Club.

CITY SWISS CLUB

84th Annual Banquet and Ball

at the

DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, LONDON, W.1

on

FRIDAY, 2nd DECEMBER, 1949

In the Chair: THE SWISS MINISTER

Monsieur HENRY DE TORRENTÉ.

For the 2nd year since the war, the City Swiss Club has held its customary Annual Banquet and Ball at the Dorchester Hotel, it was the 84th of its kind, and if it would not have been for the two intervening wars, during which these functions were dispensed with, it would have been the 93rd, the Club having been founded in 1856.

Although not the oldest Swiss Society in this country, the City Swiss Club with its 93 "Summers" has become a respectable old Lady, but underneath a "withered" bosom she still harbours a young and warm beating heart. There are no symptoms of senile decay apparent, quite the contrary, the old Lady can even get "frisky"; you ought to have seen how cheerful and well preserved she looked on that evening, in all her glory and finery.

One often hears some of the older members talking about the pre-war functions of the Club, with their brilliant array of famous *invités*, consisting of Diplomats, Soldiers, Statesmen, Scientists, Writers, etc., and invariably it is said, that one will never see those times again. Well, I am not so sure, this last Banquet came pretty well up to the standard of the former functions, with the exception perhaps of the culinary display, which after all, is not the main item nor the only purpose of such an entertainment.

Nearly 400 members and friends attended the Banquet on Friday, December 2nd, 1949, and were received, previous to the Dinner, by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, Honorary President of the Club, accompanied by Mr. P. A. Moehr, President. (Owing to the passing away in Switzerland, of the President's father-in-law, Mme. Moehr was unable to attend, and we are expressing to her our deepest sympathy in her sad bereavement.)

Great animation and an almost tropical heat reigned in the spacious and luxurious Foyer where cocktails were served, and where one had an opportunity to meet many friendly faces, and what a Babel of tongues? French, Italian, "Schwyzerdütsch," Romantsch, and, of course, English could be heard, it reminded one almost of a Meeting of UNO.

The gay laughter of some of the younger generation, which I am glad to say, was well represented, acted as a welcome tonic, and was a good omen for what was to follow.

Almost on time, the red coated Toast Master announced "Your Excellency, My Lord, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dinner is served!", and the happy company entered the richly decorated Banqueting Hall.

The crystal chandeliers spread their light over a very brilliant gathering, the gay colours and the sparkle of the Ladies dresses presented a most impressive sight.

The top table, at which the official guests took their seats, was richly decorated with flowers in our national colours. A huge Swiss Flag side by side with the Union Jack was displayed at one end of the Hall.

A noted absentee was the banner of the Club, which, many years ago was presented to the Society by its Ladies; it has become the victim of another Banquet, the venerable fraternity of moths has played havoc with it, leaving behind nothing but the staff, which I suggest, should be presented to the "Landesmuseum" in Zurich.

Attractive Menu cards, designed by our compatriot Mr. P. Savoie, adorned the tables and added colour to the scene.

After Grace had been said by the Rev. C. Reverdin, the company sat down to an excellent dinner consisting of "Le Suprême de Sole Monselet, Le Faisan en Cocotte Péricourdine, Le Coeur de Céleri au Porto, Les Petits Pois à la Française, La Salade Mimosa, La Poire du Comice Cailler, La Génoise Marbrée" with which famous vintage wines, such as Neuchâtel, Dezaley, Dôle de Sion, Fendant, grown in the sun-kissed vineyards of our homeland were served.

Ernie Smith's Rhythmicals Orchestra played excellent and discreet "Tafelmusik."

Shortly after the coffee was served, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, proposed the Toast to H.M. the King, followed by the one to "Le Président de la Confédération et le Conseil Fédéral,"

whilst the orchestra furnished the respective National Anthems.

A Swiss Banquet, or any other function, without speeches is unthinkable, (I speak from experience) and whether one likes it or not, is of no avail, we have to have it, and that's that. Whilst on some former occasions speeches seemed to nearly exhaust the patience of the audience, I am glad to say, that this time they were of a bearable length, and the promise which had been made beforehand had thus been kept.

The first oration of the evening was entrusted, as it should be, to the President, who addressed the company on "La Patrie et nos Invités." Mr. Moehr, on rising from his seat received a hearty ovation.

He expressed his pleasure, that the Swiss Minister, in spite of his manifold engagements, was able, for the first time and in the capacity of Honorary President of the Club, to take the Chair at the Annual Banquet, and voiced his regrets, that Madame de Torrenté, being still in Switzerland, was not able to be present.

The President also welcomed some of the Minister's collaborators and their Ladies, M. and Mme. E. de Graffenried, Counsellor of Legation, M. and Mme. V. Umbrecht, Commercial Attaché, M. le Colonel and Mme. Rieser, Military and Air Attaché, M. A. R. Lindt, Press Attaché, M. P. Clottu, Labour Counsellor, and M. and Mme. E. M. Bircher, Secretary of Legation; thanking them for their always willing help, and the interest they are taking in the affairs of the Colony.

"The City Swiss Club," he said, "has always cultivated the friendship of prominent Englishmen, and the one who has helped us in this respect, and who

is unfortunately prevented from being with us to-day, is Colonel Anton Bon."

Mr. Moehr extended a special welcome to Lord and Lady Willoughby de Broke, thanking him for his valuable assistance, always so readily given, in fostering the bonds between our two countries.

"Sometimes we read books in English by Englishmen about our country," the speaker continued, "and we have often wondered whether they really know our country so well. At one of our Meetings we had one of these Gentlemen to give us a lecture and obviously we expected to hear an *exposé* in English. Imagine our surprise, when without a script or note of any kind, we heard in flawless French a sequence of historical facts about our country, some of which were hardly known to us Swiss here. This lecture was given by Professor de Beer, who is here to-night with Mme. de Beer. Our friend is a F.R.S. and Professor of Embriology at the London University, and President of the Linnean Society. He has recently published a book entitled "Travellers in Switzerland," which demonstrates amply his knowledge of our homeland."

The President also mentioned the presence of Mr. Arnold Lunn, accompanied by Lady Mabel Lunn, saying, "that Switzerland owes a great deal to him, especially in the sphere of skiing and by his writings he has brought untold visitors from these shores to our country."

He welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Crepin, representing British Members of the S.A.C., as well as Wing-Commander and Mrs. Bauman, of the Alpine Club, and Colonel S. Cave, President of the Ski Club of Great



Top Table with Official Guests.



General View of the Banqueting Hall.

Britain, Colonel and Mme. St. Townend of the Anglo-Swiss Society, Mr. and Mrs. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer," Mr. and Mrs. Illis, President of the Swiss Club, Bradford, Mr. and Mrs. P. Brun, representing the Swiss Club, Birmingham.

Mr. Moehr greeted the Presidents and their Ladies of the following Swiss Societies: Swiss Economic Council (Mr. and Miss E. Steiner); Swiss Mercantile Society (Mr. and Mrs. W. Meier); Nouvelle Société Helvétique (Dr. and Mrs. H. W. Egli); Unione Ticinese (Mr. and Mrs. C. Berti); Société de Secours Mutuels (Mr. and Mrs. A. Gandon); Swiss Benevolent Society (represented by Mr. R. Dupraz). The following were also guests of the Club: Dr. H. Rast, Mr. and Mrs. O. Ernst, Manager, Swiss Tourist Office; Rev. H. Blum, Rev. and Mme. C. Reverdin and Rev. A. Lanfranchi.

A sincere welcome was extended by the speaker to the Ladies present, he said "What would this gathering be without your adorning presence?"

Mr. Moehr concluded his address by saying: "We are living in turbulent and difficult times, but we who have enjoyed the hospitality of this great Island in good and bad times, we do not despair. We have full confidence in the levelheadedness of the great British people who will be capable of bringing back again the Prosperity and happiness we knew before the wars, and I would like to close by expressing the hope, that we may soon partake of a freer exchange of good things between this great land, where we have set up our homes, and our Switzerland which we love so dearly."

The President's address was loudly cheered by the entire company.

The next speaker was the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, to whom was accorded a warm reception. After having thanked the President for the kind allusions to him and his collaborators at the Legation, he said:

"Chers compatriotes,

De la chaude atmosphère qui se dégage de la manifestation de ce soir, il est aisé d'induire que les Suisses de l'étranger oublient facilement ce qui les divise pour retenir ce qui les unit.

Il n'y a guère plus de douze ans que Ramuz, notre grand Ramuz, préfaçant une revue d'art écrivait: Comment parler de la Suisse, qui est un pays qui n'existe pas? Ce n'était heureusement là qu'une boutade. En effet, après avoir représenté que sur "le plan de l'expression", il n'y avait pas de culture suisse, Ramuz reconnaissait volontiers que la Suisse existait "même énormément", pour reprendre son expression, sur le plan politique et le plan militaire, et que cette unité stratégique fondée sur la nature comportait également un certain climat, une certaine manière de se tenir, de marcher, de vivre, de considérer les choses, une certaine optique "dont on ne voit pas bien jusqu'à quelle profondeur elle peut s'étendre, car il y a beaucoup de choses à voir et il y a beaucoup de façon de les voir"; en bref que cette unité stratégique de la Suisse fondée sur la nature imposait une allure commune à tous ses habitants.

L'existence d'un "*esprit suisse*" se superposant au particularisme cantonal a fait souvent l'objet d'âpres controverses. Le Suisse qui vit en Suisse a souvent l'impression d'être apparenté au pays dont il parle la langue plus intimement qu'à ses propres compatriotes. Certes, il est conscient d'une unité profonde qui réside, comme l'a dit M. Motta, dans "une conception commune de l'Etat" fondé sur l'idée que le peuple se gouverne lui-même. Mais, dans de nombreux domaines il perçoit surtout les dissemblances qui lui masquent les traits communs à tous nos peuples. Les arbres l'empêchent un peu de voir le forêt.

Pour le Suisse de l'étranger au contraire, les disparités ethniques ou linguistiques ne jouent qu'un rôle très effacé. Tout en s'attachant à sa patrie d'adoption

— et cela est particulièrement le cas en Grande-Bretagne — la colonie suisse ne cesse de lui apparaître comme une grande famille. Il puise son origine dans l'un de ces minuscules états jaloux de son particularisme et cependant il se sent étroitement lié à ses compatriotes non seulement par son attachement à la patrie commune mais également par l'esprit suisse, c'est-à-dire une certaine manière d'envisager les hommes et les choses. Il a été le premier à comprendre que ce particularisme loin de constituer une faiblesse était un facteur d'équilibre et d'équanimité.

Quoiqu'il en soit, l'existence de l'esprit suisse, surtout depuis la dernière guerre, ne paraît plus guère contestée. Je n'en veux pour preuve que ces quelques lignes de M. de Reynold, l'illustre écrivain fribourgeois. "Il n'y a point de littérature suisse, puisqu'il n'y a point de langue suisse. Il n'y a point de civilisation suisse. Mais il y a un *génie suisse*, qui appose sa marque de maison, sa marque de cité sur tout ce que la Suisse importe des grandes patries de ses langues, des mères, de ses formes de civilisation; elle l'appose aussi sur tout ce qu'elle exporte en échange. Ce certificat d'origine fait tout notre originalité."

Cet esprit suisse nous vaut l'indépendance du jugement, un solide équilibre et cette sérénité qui nous valent l'estime de l'étranger. Nous ne cherchons pas à nous comparer à nos grands voisins, ni à exagérer notre importance. Nous sommes fiers d'être Suisses, mais nous voulons l'être sans forfanterie, ni pédanterie, sans croire que nous avons reçu quelque mission providentielle d'instruire les autres, sauf par l'exemple, du succès de nos expériences politiques et économiques. Ce qui ne doit pas nous empêcher de rester conscients de notre personnalité et de résister à l'emprise de nos grands voisins en cultivant les vertus essentielles de notre peuple: la passion de la liberté, la tradition, la volonté de défense, la fidélité à la parole donnée, le sens des réalités et de la mesure.

De ce génie suisse, modeste mais fier, réaliste mais généreux, la Colonie suisse de Londres, j'en suis certain, reflète toujours fidèlement l'image, aujourd'hui comme par le passé."

Loud and long applause greeted the words of our popular Minister.

The task to say "Thank You!", on behalf of the guests, was entrusted to Professor G. R. de Beer, F.R.S., who very wittily, in flawless French and English, and appreciable "Schwyzerdütsch," thanked the President and the members of the City Swiss Club for their generous hospitality.

Unfortunately space does not allow me to enlarge on this really fine and excellent address of one of the best and most distinguished friends our country ever had.

The thunderous applause which followed his oration was proof enough how much his words were appreciated.

Amongst the many supporters of the Swiss Benevolent Society, the City Swiss Club occupies an honourable place, and it was a befitting occasion, that the gathering should give a thought to those of our countrymen, who, mostly through no fault of their own, have struck a bad patch in their lives.

Mr. R. Dupraz, Hon. Vice-President, of this Society, in which he has worked so hard for many years, made a touching Appeal to the generosity of the company, and I am glad to report, that his sincere Appeal met with a ready response, the considerable amount of £125.0.0 having been collected.

This concluded the official part of the evening, and after a short interval Dancing started to the catching tunes of an excellent orchestra.

If the first part of the evening was a success, the second one was no less so; whilst dancing is usually reserved for the younger generation, it was good to see, that many of a "riper" age and "portly" dimensions, took to the floor, and judging by their smiling faces, seemed to have enjoyed every bit of it, and were even asking for more.

The idea of catering for those whose "dancing years are over" by a Cabaret, seems to be a fallacy, I noticed but a few, who did not take the "plunch," and many consider a cabaret performance as a waste of time and money, and as far as my experience goes, I think they are not far wrong.

The first turn of the Cabaret show consisted of a couple of comic dancers; not being a comic myself, I failed to be thrilled, especially by the display of the "Egyptian Ballet," to my mind it was a bit out of place in Park Lane. Then followed a conjuror, who was clever and not vulgar, and as a last turn, a very attractive young Lady sang songs at the piano, quite wittingly, and then the Dance went on.

By special concession, an extra half hour dancing was granted, bringing the "closing time" to 1.30 a.m.

"Auld Lang Syne" was then sung, and so came to a close a really very enjoyable evening, an evening which does great credit to the organisers, who deserve the thanks of all those who attended this second "Austerity Banquet."

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